

## Weight Loss And Fitness From A Pill

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The solution to obesity and health problems related to excess weight may be near. Scientists have developed what amounts to fitness in a pill. Bill Allin [http: billallin.com](http://billallin.com)

One Episode of the original Star Trek series had the Enterprise crew finding rather dull slave-like humanoids on the surface of a planet while a very different creature ensconced in caves below gave them orders. The subterranean species had evolved, though lack of use of their limbs--then most of their bodies--to the point where they were little more than brains on pedestals.

They had developed the skills of telepathy so they could communicate with each other and give orders to the surface species who grew food for them and provided for their minimal other needs. The brain-only creatures were, in effect, the ultimate evolution of the perfect brain.

I was reminded of that episode today when I read of the [scientists in California](#) who had produced a chemical that allowed sedentary mice to live as if they were fit and active. In more active mice the experimental drug GW1516 from GlaxoSmithKline increased their endurance by 75 percent.

No doubt this research will be welcomed by people who require treatment for obesity or muscle wasting diseases and well as by athletes who want to improve their performance. Of course the anti-doping agency that acts on behalf of the International Olympic Committee is working furiously to develop a method for detecting the drug in athletes participating in the Beijing Olympics. Ronald Evans, a researcher at Salk Institute, which hosted the study, has developed just such a test.

But what of athletes who participate in sports or other athletic endeavours who never make it to the international level of competition or the national level where testing is done? What about fathers who want to look good in the eyes of their sons, who at middle age want to keep up with their boys just reaching their natural athletic peak?

While as a society we would welcome a prescription that would enable obese people who have no easy way to account for their great weight (genetic factors are still very much in the running) to return to a more normal or natural size, thus reducing their risks of health problems that put a burden on the health care system and our own pocketbooks, this may be a significant step toward humans evolving very different bodies from what we know now.

If we don't need to exercise in order to remain fit, eventually some of our appendages may not be needed.

Enter medical ethics committees and national lawmakers. Despite the fears that science fiction writers have encouraged us to have about new scientific developments involving the human body, we have the ability to control the sale and use of such products.

Science fiction writers (some of whom worked for heads of state of powerful countries) made us believe that nuclear energy and bombs could easily get into the hands of rogue Goldfinger-like rascals who could hold the world at ransom with their threats. Or, indeed, could destroy the planet with the push of a button. The truth was much different. Terrorists don't have such highly developed scientific skills. Bomb shelters are used for cold storage. Threat of "the bomb" is for old movies. Except in the USA where keeping such threats active has seen President Bush through two elections.

Should we fear that one day people will be able to have healthy hearts, lungs and other organs so that they don't

have to exercise, just take a pill once a day? My answer is an unqualified No.

With well over six billion of us on the planet now, the cost of supplying evolution-altering drugs for a sufficient number of people that it would change the future of our species is highly unlikely.

If it were possible, we would have AIDS drugs in the hands of everyone who is HIV positive and prevention information and devices in the hands of everyone who could contract the disease. Bill Gates, once the world's richest man (he's third now), has a foundation to supply information and drugs for AIDS victims, but even he can't afford to help more than a tiny minority.

Of course we must have legislation in place for those who would find nefarious uses for any drug or chemical. But fear? No.

Instead we should be applauding new scientific developments, encouraging our governments to become more involved with sponsoring promising studies, and learning ourselves how to keep our bodies in healthy and fit shape for the hundred or so years that our children are expected to live.

Depending on science to solve our health problems in the future bears no more wisdom than taking Prozac or cocaine to relieve our anxieties today. The strength of the future will lie--as it does now--with those who can look after themselves without depending on medical science to solve problems our descendants shouldn't develop in the first place.

Bill Allin

***Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems, a guidebook for parents and teachers who want to grow children who know how to look after themselves, their minds and their bodies, without having to depend on medical science to help them get by.***

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